The Interspecies Newsletter

Summer 2001

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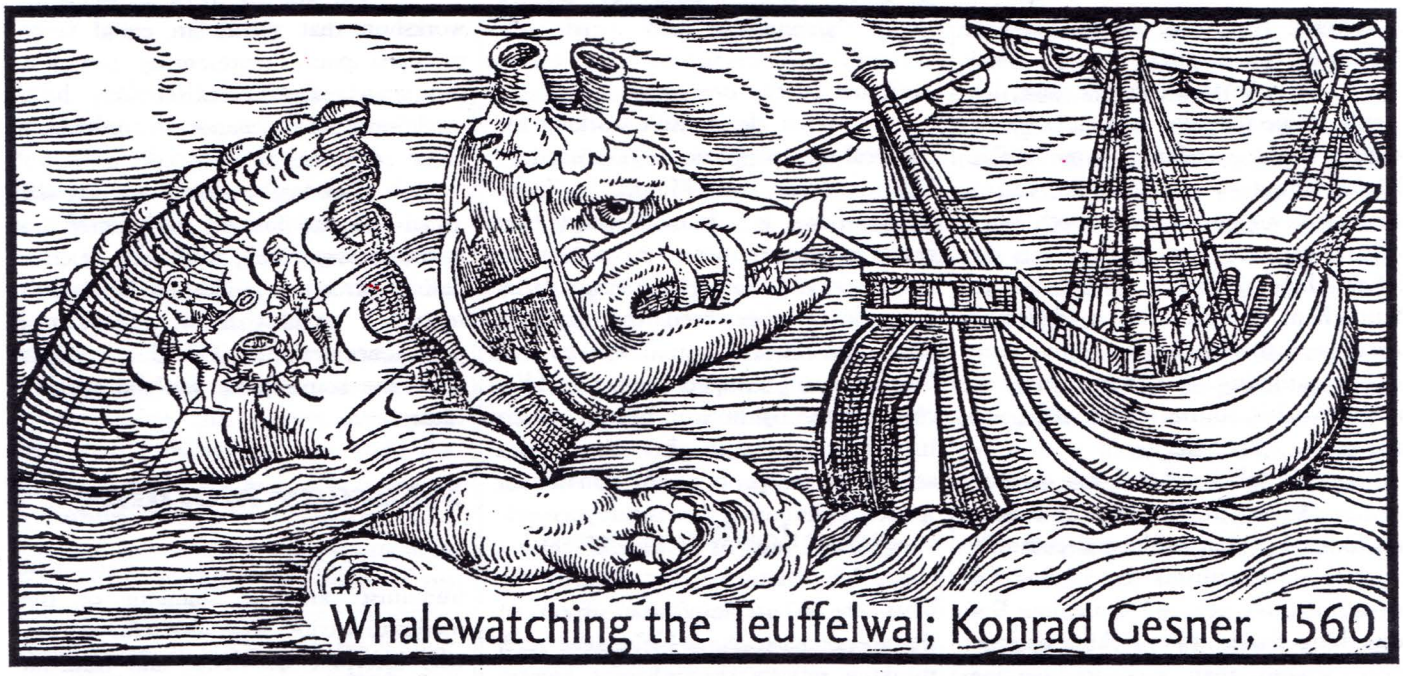


Whalewatching the Teuffelwal; Konrad Gesner, 1560

The Orca Workshop

The so-called "southern resident" population of orcas--J, K, and L pods--spends a significant part of each summer feeding on salmon along the scenic west side of San Juan Island in northern Puget Sound. Because this near-shore habitat is located in the middle of the metropolitan areas of Seattle, Vancouver, and Victoria, these orcas are the most watched, studied, loved, groped and photographed whale group in the world.

Using photo-identification methods that focus on shape and markings of the dorsal fin, annual censuses have been conducted on these whales since 1974. The census shows that the population grew steadily each year, and by 1995 there were nearly 100 individual whales in the three distinct pods. But by October 1999 the count had dropped precipitously to 83 whales, a decline of more than 15%. This decline is in marked contrast to the 3% rise of the orca population that resides two hundred miles north off the coast of Vancouver island.

Three factors are commonly cited to explain the decline of the southern residents: 1) high levels of toxic chemicals in the orcas bodies, especially PCBs 2) the vastly diminished availability of food resources mostly salmon, and 3) increased whalewatching activities in the San Juan Islands themselves. Although whalewatching regulations exist, they are ineffectual.

On the weekend of May 19, the Puget Sound Chapter of the American Cetacean Society and "Orca Free" collaborated to produce a workshop in Bellingham Washington with the very worthy objective of bringing together biologists, environmental activists, natural resource bureaucrats, educators, self-designated ombudsmen, whalewatching entrepreneurs, whale film makers, and one lone interspecies artist, myself, in an attempt to develop a strategic action plan to address the critical problems affecting the orcas.

I am not usually interested in attending such mainstream animal-issue gatherings because of the conceptually limited, and essentially data-driven format of the discussions. This one got my attention because it focused on seating an ecumenical gathering representing many different vocational and avocational approaches to

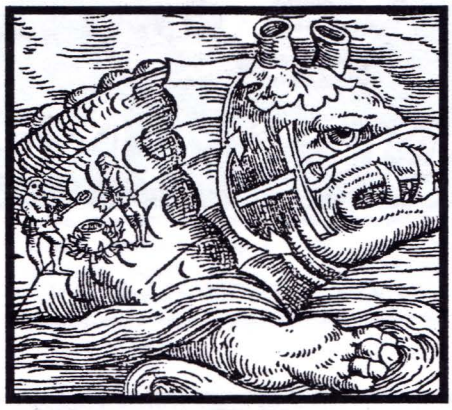
studying, playing with, caring about, working for, documenting, writing, and even making money from the local orcas. I am serious to suggest that I secretly wished they had further expanded the context of the gathering to include an orca T-shirt maker, a public health officer *and* the president of the Chamber of Commerce of at least two of the major cities, a pulp mill chemist, an officer of a fisherman's guild, and the owner of a shipping fleet that travels between Vancouver and Seattle.

Despite this laudable diversity, I still suspected the format of our meeting would crystallize as a predictable debate about whales' rights versus resource development, with both sides relying on numbers and charts to define their positions. I traveled to Bellingham representing a different paradigm; believing in the actual form of our gathering as a better measure of the whale's future, rather than any strategy we might devise.

My self-designated role seemed worthwhile, mostly because our culture has codified certain legally and culturally acceptable mechanisms for arguing for or against the demise of nature. But something clearly isn't working because more activists than ever are working on behalf of species protection, *and* the seas are more trashed than ever *and* the whales are dying. Perhaps the strategy that activists follow to feel useful—such as engaging lawyers to advocate for nature before judges—isn't much good at saving anything.

I also went because I don't mind being viewed by a room of peers as an incorrigible curmudgeon, a hopeless idealist, or even an epistemological clown who seems to find demonic joy gumming up a serious environmental discussion.

At the outset, the workshop leaders outlined a goal of generating a report outlining specific strategies either passed or rejected. I dissented right away, arguing that the medium is the message, and that the holistic nature of our gathering must be regarded as the foremost strategy



instigated by the organizers.

What clearly isn't working for the local orca population, diminished by fifteen percent since Monica Lewinsky hit the news, is a human society that grants regulatory power to politicians whose very success is measured by how closely they heed the glaringly anthropocentric path known as "representing the citizenry." This citizenry means human beings, which incontrovertibly weights the scales against the prosperity of any non-human species. Epitomizing this anthropocentric viewpoint, regard a recent report about US commerce that defined the biosphere as an important aspect of the greater *econosphere*. Ultimately, such thinking reflects the inherent bigotry of social Darwinism, and grants mostly old men with old thinking the power to hand down directives from above.

I would argue that politicians be counted among the last people we let decide the fate of animals. These are people who spend their days in artificially lit rooms seeking out the opinions of a few biologists of their own choice, countervailed by business people who represent the ponderous economic slant, finally enduring the opinions of a few noisy activists and representatives of the Media. I sometimes think that far more democracy and wisdom would be expressed if we simply handed this onerous task over to children between the ages of seven and sixteen.

Clearly the natural world needs ambassadors, not just gatherers of information, not just crafters of legislation, not just boosters of our profoundly anti-environmental economy. Playing on this stage makes me long for the insight of John Lilly and Jacques Cousteau who wrote many years ago that the cetaceans will best survive when humans grant them legal standing through a UN trust protectorate. They called it the Cetacean Nation.

All to say that a weekend workshop that grants an equal voice to participants representing not just politicians, and scientists may have a glimmer of a chance to provide a balanced forum.

One might regard such diversity as an *ecological* format. If the medium is the message then, ultimately, such a holistic structure guides us by default toward a world that takes ecological coexistence seriously. Could it possibly offer me some hope for the whale's future?

Saturday Morning

Edward O. Wilson writes that humanists are the shamans of the intellectual tribe, wise men and women who interpret knowledge and transmit the folklore, rituals, and scared texts to the greater culture. Scientists are the scouts and hunters. No one rewards a scientist for what he knows. Nobel prizes and other trophies are bestowed for the new facts and theories he brings home to the tribe.

Keeping that in mind, it was disappointing, but no great surprise, that most of the biologists decided to stay home. In fact, our group was not very diverse at all, consisting of mostly whale activists, with just two bonified researchers and one lone whale bureaucrat in attendance. The Media was not invited for fear that their reportage would inhibit all those absent biologists from speaking their minds.

From Wilson's perspective, the scientist's didn't show up because there was no data here to scout out. This meeting was entirely about

interpretation, thoughts concerning our own perceptions about the problems of whales, a self-reflective toying with mindsets that rankles the biologist's egregiously unjustified sense of neutrality.

By contrast, an activist's career is self-motivated, driven by compassion, undertaken by well-educated idealists ardent about environmental preservation, people who know going in that they won't make much money, and that principles count for more than money. For one example, the lawyer who is currently spearheading the endangered species designation for the Puget Sound orcas told me he loved his work, had already helped protect the golden trout, and had depleted his salary potential by at least a hundred thousand dollars per year to work within the animal protection movement.

Playing the Angles

Our workshop leader was a bright young woman who had been for some years guiding business managers through a meeting model known as the "Strategic Funnel Process". Like most everyone else in the room, she relinquished a successful career to help animals and the environment.

As a funnel suggests, the guided discussion followed a format of defining an issue in the broadest terms, then adopting a funnel-like discussion process to refine the indicators, problems, goals and objectives. Out the other end, eventually comes a plan of action, a mission statement, and most importantly, a newfound sense that a diverse group focusing on various disconnected aspects of one general cause, are now bonded into a working coalition. Everyone present affirmed the empowerment that comes through an expanded network.

It was clear from the start that the group was attentive to new ideas, new shifts in perception to drop into the open mouth of our conceptual funnel. It was also clear that the group vastly preferred their own familiar dance of mining data as the best practical method for protecting orcas in an imperfect world.

In keeping with the geometric motif, regard the activist's struggle as a circular process, a golden ring if you will, that starts by discovering some new, profound angle to emphasize the plight of whales and their habitat. This fresh angle is then polled and publicized to galvanize the public around the issue. Let it be noted that this "public" has shown itself time and time again to be overwhelmingly in support of environmental reforms with the one life-throttling caveat that it doesn't ask them to give up their SUVs. The galvanized public demands that politicians activate bureaucrats to grant funding to biologists to provide research. If the original angle hasn't been diluted too much by the telling and retelling, then the plums of this research are gathered up by the activists who cook the numbers into a more pointed insight they then use either to galvanize an even greater public segment or directly confront the despoilers with irrefutable arguments for protection.

Of many "angles" proposed at our workshop, the most obvious good idea asked for better funding for necropsy studies on dead whales washed up in Puget Sound. This was suggested by the same courageous biologist who blew the whistle on the Navy's sonar testing in the Bahamas. In that instance, necropsy revealed that all the stranded whales had hemorrhaged their inner ears.

If the local orcas were found to have high levels of e coli, for example, we could assume that a local sewer treatment plant had something to do with it.

As a pertinent aside, one activist pointed out that a recent analysis of water near pristine Glacier Bay Alaska has shown a three thousand time increase in the amount of fecal effluent, all of it traced directly to dumping by cruise ships.

Worldviews

With the strategy of the golden ring alluded to at the start of our workshop discussion, (although no one but me calls it that), it soon became clear that non-data driven issues would be deemed intellectually intriguing but ultimately irrelevant to the process. The current US lawyer-in-chief, attorney general John Ashcroft may have said it best when he recently replied to reporters "I'm not a good person to be asking 'how do you feel' questions. I *feel* like doing my job."

At best, "non-data" implies opinion and speculation, and at worst, whimsy. In a culture void of any overarching moral authority to preserve nature, moral arguments are deemed relative, unauthoritative. Everyone has one or two of them. They make the bureaucrats walk away. Judges throw them out of court. Despoilers laugh up their sleeves.

It's funny, I've always thought it was the data that was unauthoritative.

I argued that there are many environmental ideas possessed of a greater ethical conviction than "scientific indicators", and that we not forget to let one or two of them dribble into the mouth of our whale funnel. Certainly, no one disavows the practical value of indicators as a means of playing the golden ring game, but

maybe we ought to consider not playing that game any more, and spend our weekend devising a new activist paradigm.

How often does data actually protect animals? Isn't the environmental crisis best understood as a crisis in human perception? If so, then isolating indicators may only serve to make activists feel useful for playing a game by rules that, from another perspective, upholds the perceptual cause of the orcas demise? The point is subtle but important because the construct of indicators relies entirely upon the language of the objectivist worldview. It invalidates the intuitive, the artful, and the spiritual, which are, in fact, the best methods humans have ever worked out to transform perceptions.

Language is key, providing many clues about the paradigm we honor. As it pertains to this particular issue, the activists referred to themselves as *stewards* of the whales, a perception that treats the orcas as patients seeking a cure, perhaps from the human cancer that infects every earthly sphere except the econosphere. Indicators are what doctors use to diagnose disease.

Jumping through Hoops

I prefer to define myself, not as a steward, but as an ambassador. Rather than diagnose indicators of disturbance, or of lack of food, I say why not categorize all these indicators as sub-headings under the perceptual and political rubric of self-determination. Let us dream up a world in which whales get to determine their own lives. Everybody knows the detritus of human activity impedes any whale's ability to determine it's own fate, so let's call human activity a *negative* indicator by default. So let's stop jumping through hoops just to abide by a stale process that upholds outmoded perceptions that are causing the death of nature.

Only a dreamer dreams such dreams. Granted, self-determination may be a political term with admitted perceptual overtones when used to describe the rights of animals. It certainly endorses the political standing promoted by the Cetacean Nation. But the bureaucrats and politicians who actually write the legislation, don't dream about "relations" with whales. They dream "wildlife policy".

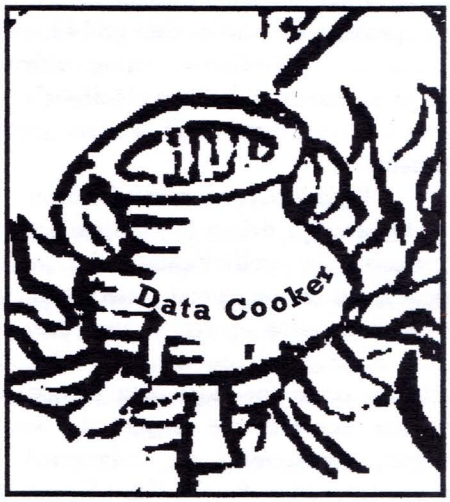
The shift of values expressed by language like *steward* versus *ambassador*, *policy* versus *rights*, and *diagnosis* versus *relations*, reaches for a different kind of golden ring. As one supporter at the workshop remarked, "Self-determination means we have to consider not only data, but what it means for a whale to have a good day. Is it a good day for the orcas when whalewatching boats follow them for ten hours straight? Has it been a good day when biologists shoot darts into their hide."

In the old paradigm, scientists gathering data were largely exempt from the regulations that kept the rest of us from getting too close to whales. But if we use self-determination as our bottom line, scientists are suddenly perceived as much a part of the problem as everybody else. The list of suspects grows larger by the minute.

The Good Day Indicator

It seems no coincidence, that the purveyor of the "good day concept" directs the only activist organization in Puget sound that specifically targets whalewatching as a cause of stress in whales. In his own words, "Most people agree the whales are crashing because of chemical pollution, salmon depletion, and whalewatching in that order. Whalewatching may be third on the list, but it's the issue we have the best chance of altering in the shortest amount of time."

He didn't need to add that reigning in eco-tour companies is a mighty thankless task. These are hard-working entrepreneurs who insist that the whales join the econosphere. They regard their own job as educating the public about the orcas' needs.



Self-described good guys, commercial whale watchers fight fiercely when someone bearing intuition (but no irrefutable data) decides to place them in the despoilers hall of fame alongside dam builders and oil company executives.

The morning's most imaginative "indicator" was suggested by a woman who holds a near-legendary status for writing op-ed pieces about whales for the Seattle Dailies. On a blackboard displaying lists focusing on sediment toxicity, and herring mortality, she asked that we consider conducting a poll among schoolchildren asking what they are dreaming about orcas. As she put it so well, "What if 100 kids are having the same dream about one particular whale?

At the end of the first day, a third of our group called it quits. Before departing, one of the castaways described a poll his organization had recently taken in Western Washington to assess the public's resolve to protect these whales. 34% answered that protecting the whales was critical. Of those, 5% believed boats were the primary problem, 67% thought it was toxins, and 58% blamed it on the collapse of the salmon fishery.

Precautions

No one becomes an activist without first experiencing a deep spiritual connection to nature. This love affair (what else can we call it?)

provides abundant fuel for the activist heart to confront the human arrogance that despoils nature.

However, this arrogance is only obvious to lovers. In fact, it so deeply entrenched in our society as to be considered a virtue by some violators like our current vice president, while it goes mostly unnoticed by the vast majority of the public.

Activism is a schizophrenic discipline because the deep spiritual experience that got activists involved in the first place, also gave them the eyes to see the national arrogance as the status quo. Yet the only way activists know to elicit change is to work within the status quo.

Some of the rules they accept just to play the game would make a less devoted lover turn and run. Consider just one, "the burden of proof", a rule that activists abide by, even though it ultimately feeds the perpetuation of arrogance.

It doesn't matter that pulp mills, chemical plants, and the town of Bellingham are all dumping into the orcas' environment toxins known to destroy the immune systems of living organisms. But the burden of proof demands that activists demonstrate that this dumping is specifically harming orcas. Otherwise, politicians bury it in the slow-as-molasses list of things the government ought to change if it's public servants only had more time, money, and resolve. It doesn't matter that 67% of the public strongly believes that toxins are killing the whales. They are not experts. Nor will the dumping be stopped if specific toxins are linked to specific local industries. Dioxin for example, is primarily produced by pulp mills. Granted, but how can anyone be certain that any specific pulp mill's dioxin caused the die-off?

Remain practical

As the workshop progressed into Sunday, it became apparent that the majority of activists in our group don't question this basic rule. It's really a simple matter of practicality, the only viable way to honestly serve animals and habitat at this precise moment. What are they supposed to do? Wait around forever for human consciousness to transcend itself? Does anyone disagree that the southern population of resident orcas simply doesn't have the luxury to wait patiently for metropolitan Seattle to embrace the community of all species rather than steam-rollering it? How else do we draft a working strategy to get the federal courts to place the orcas on the endangered species list?

Such a listing sets in motion a remarkable urgency to solving the problem, starting with a vastly quickened schedule to institute protective measures. Although such status does not actually annul the burden of proof, it certainly compromises its absurd power. You can be sure that spewing pulp mill will be fined and possibly even closed without giving its owner the chance to flaunt his usual option of putting up legal roadblock after roadblock.

Because the Bush administration is comprised of a cast of characters instigating profoundly anti-environmental policies such as the lowering of arsenic levels in human drinking water, the court case for the orcas has to be absolutely air-tight. In order to win that quickened status, every practical activist in the room knows that the court will insist that the burden of proof not only be adhered to, but be well fed, entertained.

The burden of proof is less an issue in Germany, France, Italy, and England, where it is counter-balanced by a more earth-friendly rule known as the "precautionary method". If, for instance, a German company wants to introduce a new chemical into paper technology, it must be rigorously tested and irrefutably shown that the effluent generated will not pollute the environment.

Americans use the precautionary method right now for medical products. It's the reason most often cited by drug companies to justify the ballooning price structure for new medicine. Although the precautionary method clearly lessens the immediate threat of pollution to humans, habitat, and wild animals, ironically most of the testing is done on animals.

All Around Us

I left the workshop a few hours before it concluded. For days afterward, it seemed that everything I heard about or read related directly to the perceptions aroused there. Arriving back home, my thirteen year old daughter informed me she had spent the day trying out a summer job working as a waitress on a local whalewatching boat. She needs the money to pay for an outward bound trip to Utah, so she lowered her eyes to tell me she just couldn't do the job. "They don't give the orcas any room." She responded when I asked what the problem was. "And the so-called naturalist was a liar. He kept telling the tourists that the orcas actually like people to visit them. It would make me ill to be on that boat all summer." I was proud of her.

I opened my email on Monday morning to discover this letter from an interspecies member:

"When I asked my teacher what the best action is for working with whales, he replied: 'Teach the human beings to love all divinely created things. When this occurs, people will no longer need to go and look at the whales.'"

The woman noted that she had asked for advice because of conflicting thoughts about her naturalist job. "I love being on the water." She continued. "I love the wind and the air and the relative quiet and the movement, and, at the top of the list—from some deep inner place—I love the whales. But I notice that the boat cuts through the whales path just to see them. Not in an obvious invasive way, yet it's noticeable. I notice how many boats are on the feeding grounds, and how many creatures bear cuts or scars. Imagine what we dump in the water each trip. If the

situation was reversed, with others crowding me while I'm trying to eat, or hang out with my kid, I'd be less than pleased."

I wrote back, telling her the burden of proof needs to be placed on the tourists, showing they don't upset a whale's nice day. She answered me again telling me to quote her letter but asking that I not use her name. Who knows what corporate spies read this news?

Complex Society

And finally this pertinent aside, excerpted from the monthly cultural newsletter written and published by Richard Heinberg. Richard's newsletter arrived at my door as I sat down to write about the workshop. To receive this news from a "big picture' thinker, write him at rheinberg@igc.org

"The burgeoning mass movements against privatization of basic resources, the genetic engineering of food, the patenting of organisms; against sweatshops, clearcut logging, and mining on indigenous people's land, are joined with movements to promote local production for local consumption, human rights, animal rights, preservation of natural environment, and forgiveness of debts owed by impoverished nations to international banks. There are so many identifiable groups involved, and so many issues, that the mainstream media have had a hard time understanding this as a coherent social phenomenon—to the degree that they've actually made an honest effort to do so.

"What the media can not recognize is that the elite grows accustomed to solving problems by increasing the size of the society, inventing new technologies, and expanding the bureaucracy. Eventually a point is reached at which the benefits accruing from such investments begin to diminish. Then as problems arise resulting from diminishing returns on prior and ongoing investments in complexity, they perceive only one solution: more complexity. But that just makes the problems worse. Eventually the support population wearies of the onerous burdens levied on it to sustain these increasing investments, and the society collapses. Collapse may be complete or partial, sudden or gradual. 'Collapse' in this context, simply means the return to a simpler level of organization.

"And that, in essence, is what the present global activism is advocating: less global trade, more local production and control, less investment in risky new technologies, more reliance on simpler more decentralized environmentally friendly methods of production; less exploitation of workers, more economic democracy.

"From the elite's perspective, further investment in complexity appears essential: 'Don't you see? The globalization of capital and the deployment of new technologies (like the genetic engineering of food) are necessary for further economic growth. Without them, we will not be able to sustain the standard of living to which people have become accustomed, nor will people in the developing world ever be able to attain that standard.'"

In the End

Everybody did it
So change your life
Sooner than later

Our Beluga Whale Project

For readers traveling to Europe this summer on Finnair, the airline's in-flight magazine, *Blue Wings* features a lengthy account of our ongoing work with beluga whales and petroglyphs on the Russian White Sea. Written by Interspecies director Jim Nollman, the story includes several striking photos of the whales drawing close to our boat, taken by the Colombian photographer, Hernan Patino.

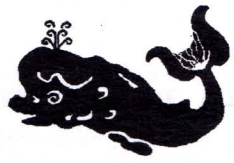
The story first appeared in the Interspecies newsletter last year.

Both Patino and Nollman will be joining Interspecies team leader Rauno Lauhakangas for an expedition this July to the White Sea. This year we'll be living aboard a twenty four foot covered boat which will be anchored for two weeks in the whales' feeding grounds.

The main goal this year is to further develop the relationship between species. To aid the cause we'll be establishing a daily acoustic regimen consisting of Tibetan Bells, as well as an electric guitar played through an underwater sound system. We may even have all white drysuits.

We'll also be working more closely with a team of linguists and biologists from Moscow's Shirshov Institute who are studying the potential for a true whale language. We'll provide the Russian team with high quality recordings, and in return, we hope to learn the methods they are using to isolate the strange phonemes of beluga language. We are also providing wide-spectrum beluga recordings for our stateside collaborators working at the bio-acoustics laboratory of the Fauna Institute in North Carolina.

We're especially excited about experimenting with our "Beluga Computer Game" constructed on a Mac laptop. This two-way sound system allows the whales themselves to control the audio output generated by computer's onboard signal samplers. Once the belugas comprehend the basic fact that their own calls generate logical responses, we're hoping for a breakthrough in our understanding of whale intellect. Keep tuned.



Book Reviews

The Well of Remembrance

Rediscovering the Earth Wisdom Myths of Northern Europe
By Ralph Metzner (Shambhala, 1994)

With Interspecies Inc so involved in interpreting ancient art depicting shamans interacting with animals, we have been naturally drawn to this excellent book about the ritual basis of Northern European culture, primarily from Germany. Metzner is a well-grounded scholar, but his sentiments clearly lie with the traditions of the ancient people themselves. In describing their ceremonies and even their mindset, he casts aside the usual academic method of presenting "primitive people" as separate and less enlightened than his own modern self, but as a distant extension of his own psyche. This refreshing perspective highlights a multi-cultural book that will interest anyone who regards the Earth as sentient, suggesting it is not only possible to resonate with other species, but a responsibility as well.

...Two ravens sit on Odin's shoulders. Every day he sends them out to fly throughout the different worlds and bring him knowledge and information about events in far-off places. As a result, one of Odin's many names was "Ravengod" and raven's are referred to as "Odin's birds". In shamanic lore, ravens and other birds are generally associated with finding lost or hidden knowledge. Because they are carrion eaters and frequented battlefields, ravens and crows were also associated with the dead and dying, which fits with Odin's role as necromancer and guide for the dead.

...The Valkyries are complex mythic figures, combining in themselves several different aspects also known from other traditions. In their role as strategic counselors to the warrior-hero, they resemble the later Greek Athena, daughter of Zeus, who acts as the cool strategist and advisor to Odysseus. In their role as death demons and spirit lovers they also resemble the Indo-Tibetan *dakinis* who were, on the one hand, the terrifying attendants of the monstrous Kali; and on the other hand, the "sky-dancing" spirit guides and initiators for Tantric Buddhist yogis.

...There were also the Ulfhednar, the "wolfskins", identified with the wolf to obtain his hunting prowess--and who inspired the enduring legends of werewolves. These...wolf coat warriors were said to be in a kind of ecstatic trance, a holy rage, when they rode into battle, howling eerily, disdaining shields, and inspiring terror in their enemies.

Quantum Evolution

The New Science of Life
By John McFadden (WW Norton and Company, 2000)

Darwin believed that the process of evolution consists of an ongoing series of mutational accidents. In effect, the best mutation survives another day. This book takes a contrary stand, theorizing that life itself controls the evolutionary process.

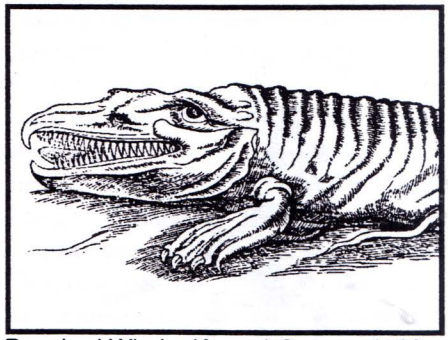
Quantum evolution proposes a theory that both complements and expands upon the much vaunted Gaia Hypothesis. But whereas Gaia relies on chaos theory and biochemistry to demonstrate its salient process, McFadden's profound book suggests that evolution may not be random at all, because quantum mechanics gives to living organisms the ability to initiate mutations. This property of living organisms to direct their own adaptations indirectly gives new meaning to the idea of consciousness, implying that every organism possesses free will.

...[Traditional myth] records a belief that life contained a divine or magical principle, absent from the inanimate world. To create life, this vital principle needed to be added, often from a living source, such as blood.

...When all other animals flee north, the Emperor penguins head south to the freezing continental interior where they congregate in nesting sites on the central Antarctic plateau. The female lays her single egg and heads north herself to the ocean, leaving the male penguin to perform perhaps nature's most exemplary display of paternal duty. He gathers the egg in a pouch and huddled together with as many as twenty-five thousand other penguins, he braves the coldest place on earth.

...The universe is anthropic in the sense that its properties must be compatible with the emergence of life and indeed intelligence. There may be (or have been) billions of alternative universes, with different values for their fundamental constants, but they are probably all sterile. The one fact that we know for certain about our universe is that all properties are compatible with our own existence.

...Quantum measurement may be the key ingredient missing in conventional theories to account for the origin of life. The ability of self-replicators to amplify their own quantum state to the classical realm, and thereby measure that state, was crucial to life's emergence. Once the first self-replicating cells were generated, the rest, as they say, is history.



Beached Whale, Konrad Gesner, 1563